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*To VIVIAN GRAHAM, whose young life suffered its first great tragedy in the passing of her grandfather, Anton Joseph Cermak, this story of a great Chicagoan and a great American is dedicated with profound sympathy and sincere hope that it may be of some help in lonely days.*

THE AUTHOR



ANTON J. CERMAK, 1873—1933


“IT IS NEEDLESS TO SAY THAT THE NEWS OF THE DEATH OF MAYOR CERMAK AFFECTS ME VERY DEEPLY AND VERY PERSONALLY.

“ASIDE FROM THE TRAGIC CHAIN OF EVENTS OF WHICH HIS DEATH IS THE RESULT, A VERY WARM FRIENDSHIP AND A VERY HIGH RESPECT FOR MAYOR CERMAK’S ABILITY, FRIENDSHIP AND LOYALTY TO HIS FRIENDS WOULD HAVE MADE HIS LOSS A HEAVY ONE TO ME UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES.

“THE BRAVE FIGHT HE MADE SHOWS CLEARLY THE WONDERFUL COURAGE OF THE MAN. THE COUNTRY AT LARGE AND THE GREAT CITY OF CHICAGO IN PARTICULAR WILL MISS A STRONG AND RESOLUTE CHARACTER.”

FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT

*In a Public Statement on learning of the  
Death of Mayor Anton J. Cermak,  
March 6, 1933.*



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## INTRODUCTORY MEMENTO

If there be people who would deny that America is still a land of opportunity for all of ability, let them read carefully this life of Anton Joseph Cermak, martyred mayor of Chicago.

No one could have had a more humble beginning and less in his favor, either in material possessions or in those vague but important things known as "connections." Yet, in the space of an average period, Cermak had elevated himself from a driver of mules in a coal mine to one of the most powerful men of his time in the affairs of his city, state and nation. By sheer ability, character, determination and application he ascended to heights that men who start with far greater advantages seldom reach.

Born in Bohemia, of a poverty-stricken family, with none of the opportunities for education that every child today possesses, he became mayor of the second largest city in his adopted country and the leader of his political party in Illinois. In his life, then, is the proof of the soundness of democracy, of the theory that in America, not wealth and fine family, but ability and character are the means by which men obtain power and position. In-

deed, the life of Cermak may well be considered an Epic of Democracy, a story as significant of the spirit of America as the stories of Washington and Lincoln.

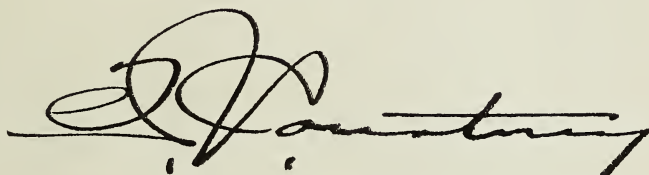
History, of course, has its own way of reaching the permanent estimate of a man, and no attempt by the author is made to predict History's verdict of Mayor Cermak. Certain it is, however, that he will not be forgotten; that neither the nation nor Chicago will cease to think of his name with admiration and respect.

Chicago will remember Cermak as the man who took the helm at a time of grave crisis—as grave as that which came with the Great Fire. The city was floundering; indeed, had crashed against the rocks of bankruptcy, moral as well as financial. With Cermak in command, Chicago not only was spared from the fate of complete wreckage, but proceeded on a newly-charted course in the direction of Progress. It is an old saying that each crisis breeds a master. This was true in Chicago's case, and the master was Cermak.

The nation will honor the name of Cermak, not only because of his achievements as Mayor of Chicago, but because of the manner of his passing. Mortally wounded, his thoughts were not of himself, but of President Roosevelt.

"I'm glad it was me instead of you," were words that only a true patriot could speak. They deserve to be, and will be, enshrined in the hearts of men with the inspira-

tional sayings of the nation's other true patriots. They were spoken at a time when, if ever, a man is tested. Cermak passed the test. And the world was immeasurably enriched.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. D. Huntington". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

*State's Attorney, Cook County.*



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Wide World

*"I'm glad it was me instead of you."*





## Up from the Mines



## CHAPTER I

### UP FROM THE MINES

It is 1889. A group of toil-grimed men are talking in low voices—so the mine boss won't overhear. They are saying:

“We oughta get more money. One dollar, ten cents is not enough.”

“Let's tell the boss he gotta pay us more.”

Everyone agrees. Then silence.

“Who'll tell the boss?”

More silence.

Each agreed that he ought to be paid more than \$1.10 a day for mule-driving in the mine. But which one had the nerve to voice the demand?

“I'll tell him!”

All eyes turned toward the speaker, who could have been the son of any of the others, so young he was.

It was Tony—Tony Cermak, coal mine mule-driver of Braidwood, Illinois.

If there is any one milestone in the life of Anton Joseph Cermak that could be set apart from the events of his life and marked “the beginning,” this incident in his youth very well could be the one.

“I’ll tell him!”

There you have the courage, the leadership, the capacity for assuming responsibility that marked his whole career.

There you also have the event which caused “Tony” to leave the tiny town of Braidwood, a dot on the Illinois prairie-land between Chicago and Springfield—two cities he was to dominate in later years. As a matter of fact, now that his full history is known, it is plain that young Cermak would have departed from Braidwood anyway. Chicago already was in his blood; it already had awakened in him the desire to “make good in the big city.”

Five years earlier, when “Tony” was eleven, he left his father’s farm near Braidwood and hit straight for Chicago. At the age when youngsters of lesser fibre would have hied themselves back home in tears, or at best, have been picked up by the policeman on the corner, Tony

Cermak started right then and there to get a foothold on Chicago. He landed a job in a sash and door mill. It paid \$2 a week.

Tony spent \$1.50 for board and room. The excess fifty cents he sent home "to help the folks." The young Tony felt then that he was on his way—to fame, to riches, to power. These were the thoughts of the 11-year-old boy. He was, however, to suffer a setback. Depression came to Chicago, work slacked at the mill, and Tony was laid off. A chance to get work at Braidwood, opening and closing the trapdoor at the mine for eighty-five cents a day, caused him to return home.

He was sixteen, a full-fledged mule-driver, when he agreed to voice the demand for higher wages. Tony "told" the boss, and the boss "told him."

"You want a raise, eh?" said the boss, John Cherry, a name remembered now only because of this unhappy association with the young "labor agitator." "I'll give you a raise. Get in that cage!"

Tony was raised in the cage—to the mine surface—then fired on the spot.

A hard youngster to keep fired long, Tony, a couple of hours later was working again at the same mine, this

time on "outside" work. That evening he was fired again when his new boss learned of the earlier incident. This double action was too much. Braidwood the next day suffered a population decrease of one. Tony Cermak was in Chicago—to stay.

Consider this beginning of the Chicago career of this young Bohemian-born lad, bred on niggardly farm land and in the black atmosphere of coal. Tens of thousands of Chicagoans had similar beginnings before him—and after him. It is the beginnings of the New American; not of the *Mayflower*, but of the steerage; not of the pure-blooded, but of the strong-blooded.

Tony Cermak was the New American, the New Chicagoan, when he came to Chicago that second time as the Twentieth Century was about to dawn.

It was the period when the lowly, but strong, dug their roots deep and solidly in the life of America. The young Cermak was one of the strong. He had the spark which was destined to lead him to power—a spark struck off in the tiny mining town of Kladno, in Bohemia, where he was born May 9, 1873, and carried with him over the Atlantic as he, a one-year-old, suckled at the breast of his Bohemian mother in the steerage of an immigrant ship.

Chicago was only then giving real promise of its future greatness when the young Cermak settled there for good.

The railroads, the stock yards, the genius of the McCormicks, the Fields and the Palmers were working their magic on the city by the lake. Three years hence, Chicago was to challenge the world with its boisterous, youthful energy by staging the Great Columbian Exposition, the World Fair of 1893. It was the period when Mayor Carter Harrison the First galloped his great white horse through Chicago's streets while the crowds gaped and applauded.

The young Cermak must have seen that first World's Fair mayor—and perhaps gaped with the others. Did he dream then that he would be mayor some day soon? Could he have foreseen, then, another World Fair in Chicago, with himself as the city's chief executive, proudly inviting the world to come and visit? And, when the first World Fair opened, bringing with it the assassination of that same Mayor Harrison, could Anton Cermak by any chance have envisioned so similar a fate?

Probably not.

Anton Cermak was no dreamer. He was a worker.



First, he worked for a railroad, the E., J. & E. Then came a job as towboy for the street car lines. The cars were drawn by horses, and young Cermak's duty was to ride an old white horse down Blue Island avenue. Here, then, was one thing he had in common with Chicago's other martyred mayor, even at that time—this riding a white horse.

Little imagination is needed to recall the temptations Chicago offered in those days to youths "on their own." The "most wicked of cities," the "modern Sodom and Gemorrah," was the way out-of-towners, jealous no doubt of its progress, referred to Chicago. No plaster-saint was youthful Tony, to be sure. But he had a head on him, a head that told him that money in a bank was preferable to wild Saturday nights. At 19 he had saved enough to purchase two horses and a wagon.

"A. J. Cermak, Teaming Contractor," had emerged.

He obtained small odd-lot jobs of hauling. Then, with characteristic vigor, he went to the biggest company in the city, the International Harvester Company, and came away with the contract for hauling waste wood for this huge concern. This contract was the foundation of the business career which was to make of him a millionaire. He never gave it up, the contract remaining in his



name always, even though the business later was taken over by his father and brothers. It wasn't in his character to give up things.

By the time Cermak was 21, he had an established business, a teaming firm with forty teams and employing forty men. There was a comfortable balance in the bank. Thoughts of marriage were in order. Already he had met 18-year-old Mary Horejs, a milliner. There was a common bond at once, in that she, too, had been born in Bohemia. A hard-worker herself, she admired the handsome young teaming contractor. Friendship grew into love. In 1894 they were married.

The young couple built their first home at Twenty-fifth street and Marshall boulevard, in the district where Cermak was later to be almost a feudal lord, and not far from the present Criminal Courts Building, which Cermak, thirty years afterward, built as president of the Board of Commissioners of Cook County. He had his office in the home, and Mary Cermak worked with him, keeping the books of the thriving business. They made an unbeatable team.

Politics began in these days to have a fascination for him and he kept an eye on the political events in his precinct and ward. But Cermak was not yet ready for a

political career. He had other things to tend to first—among them patching up his meagre education. So, after working at his business all day, he attended an adult grade school at night. Then he went to a business college “to brush up some more.”

It was a period of rising real estate values. The young contractor had a “feel” for land and he began dabbling in real estate, buying a lot here and there, selling later at a handsome profit, and repeating the process. Soon he was devoting as much energy to real estate as to his contracting business. Later it claimed most of his attention, coupled with two home loan associations which he headed. His thrifty bank account was growing.

During all this time, the shrewd young contractor-realtor was building himself a following among his own people. His superior knowledge, gleaned by tremendous diligence, caused many of his neighbors to call upon him for help and advice.

“Ask young Cermak,” became a stock phrase in the neighborhood. Soon, young as he was, he became the recognized counsellor in the community.

Here, in the confidence that his neighbors had in him, was Cermak’s first bid for power, although it was some

time before he realized it. That he should now "enter politics" in earnest was only natural. But with all the strength which the confidence of his neighbors gave him, the young Cermak had no illusions of personal greatness.

He saw the value of organization. Hence, while he might have gone against the "organization," he chose to go with it—and served as a lowly precinct worker in his neighborhood. This meant ringing doorbells to see that his neighbors were informed on the election candidates and that they went out, not only to vote, but to vote "right."

He who later was to be dictator over this same "organization" and give orders to so many, knew how to take orders—and took them. He was on the job, and when the votes were counted, Tony Cermak's district stood out as a bulwark of the "organization." The ward leaders began to count on his district at every election, and were never disappointed. It was not long before his name began to be mentioned with pride by the "big fellows" downtown as they sat in the councils of the Democratic organization presided over by Roger Sullivan, Chicago's first real political "boss."

Among the "big fellows" was George Brennan, then secretary to Sullivan. Years before, Brennan had lived

in Braidwood; indeed, had taught school there. One of his pupils had been Tony Cermak. And in that fact was the germ of the political career that was to make Cermak a "boss" even more powerful than Brennan, greater even than Roger Sullivan.

# The Rising Statesman



## CHAPTER II

### THE RISING STATESMAN

It was 1902. "Boss" Roger Sullivan was at the height of his power as overlord of the Democratic organization in Chicago. First assistant, with the title of "secretary," was the genial George Brennan, former school teacher at Braidwood, Illinois, later boss in his own right. A meeting of Democratic precinct captains had been called at a downtown Chicago hotel. The lobby overflowed with them. Among the hundreds was the young West Side precinct leader, "Tony" Cermak. It was the first such gathering he had attended.

The young Cermak was now thinking seriously of a political career. For one thing, the "boys" in his district had been suggesting that he run for some office.

"Why not the State Legislature?" some were saying.

Why not, indeed? thought Cermak. He determined to talk to the "Big Fellows" at this meeting.

Precinct captains, as a rule, in a big city political

organization have about the same standing with the "big fellows" as children used to have with Victorian parents. In other words, they were to be seen, but not heard. But the young Cermak was bent on being heard. Hunting out George Brennan, he presented himself. Cermak thought Brennan's face was familiar, but he did not suspect why.

Brennan looked at the young Bohemian quizzically for a moment.

"Tony Cermak!" he exclaimed finally. "I'll be damned! Here I've been hearing a lot about a Tony Cermak over on the West Side, and never dreamed it was the same kid I had for a pupil in the Braidwood school!"

The two warmed up to each other immediately.

"And what can I be doing for you?" asked Brennan.

"I'd like to run for the Legislature," said the young Cermak.

Brennan chewed on his cigar. He hummed and he hawed. He didn't know. He wasn't sure. After all, he protested, he was not the boss. "Sullivan was. And you know how a lot of things are in politics."



Cermak left the meeting without knowing if he had accomplished anything by his bearding of Brennan. But when the time came around some months later, young Cermak was among the Democrats slated for the State Assembly. At that time, Cermak's legislative district was rated as Republican. A Democratic candidate was not given much of a chance. But the dopesters failed to count upon the hundreds of friends, particularly among the Bohemians, who predominated, that the young teaming contractor had.

Cermak went to the Legislature, one of the youngest ever to sit as a State Representative. And at the next election he was returned with an even larger vote. It was the same story in 1906 and again in 1908.

Not many sessions passed before the other members of the Legislature began to look with respect upon the young representative from Chicago's West Side. He knew what he was about. He learned how to get things done, how to get bills safely past committees—and how to keep them safely in committees. Cermak, the political strategist, was developing.

Prohibition was still many years in the future, but even at this time Cermak was emerging as a leader of the liberals, leading the battle against the forces who

sought to restrict men's drinking privileges. Bill after bill was introduced with the purpose of closing the saloons and hampering the sale of beer and other beverages in other ways.

Cermak was as well aware of the evils in the abuses in liquor as any man. But he knew the pleasure that the working man, the foreign-born American particularly, derived from a stein of beer. He knew what it meant to a man to be able to go into a corner saloon and spend an enjoyable evening over beer mugs with his fellows. So, from the beginning he fought the prohibition forces in the Legislature, raising the banner of personal liberty years before other politicians had the courage to withstand the pressure of the dry and so-called reform elements.

As a leader of the famed United Societies, he led the fight against the Illinois Prohibition Laws. That fight was lost, but Cermak never gave up. Just before his death, those laws were repealed by the State Legislature of 1933, many members of which recognized Cermak as their leader. To most there was a marked touch of sadness in the fact that an assassin's bullet cut down Cermak before he could see, not only the State, but also the National, prohibition laws amended. He had given so much of his energy toward that end.

Some men are content to remain in the State Legislature all their lives, their constituents permitting. But Cermak wanted more power, more action. His real interest was in the affairs of Chicago rather than in the state as a whole. Thus, after four terms at Springfield, he grabbed at the opportunity of running for alderman in 1909. The ward was still Republican and Cermak had a sitting Republican alderman to beat. It was a tough assignment, but he did it. And the following two years he was re-elected.

To the city council Cermak brought a practical vision and a level-headedness that at once made him a conspicuous member, just as he was in the State Legislature. During his service in the city council he learned much about the workings of the city government that was to stand him—and Chicago, in such good stead when not many years later he was to preside over that same council as Mayor. That Mayor Cermak possessed a knowledge of municipal affairs that few mayors had, was one reason for his unusual achievements.

In 1912, Cermak added his first executive office to his career. This was Bailiff of the Municipal Court of Chicago, one of the important local offices. Occupying a post which gave him control over a number of city employes, he was now looming as a power in the councils of

his party, although to be sure he was still far from being a "big fellow."

The fact that as Bailiff, Cermak had the duty of carrying out eviction orders brought out the characteristic of brotherly sympathy which he had in good measure. It was not in Cermak to put a family out on the street because a judge ordered him to perform this duty, and let it go at that. On his own initiative, he would see that the unhappy family was cared for and had shelter. Many times that meant digging into his own pocket. Cermak was not one to boast of these incidents, but it is known that he helped hundreds of families in this manner.

When the number of evictions grew so that it was impossible for him to personally help all, he met this problem with characteristic resourcefulness. He organized the Bailiffs' Benevolent Association of Chicago, which exists to this day. A number of citizens contributed to a fund for the aid of evicted families, and financial assistance was distributed under Cermak's direction in a systematic, although sympathetic, manner. In 1919 he went back to the city council as alderman, serving two more terms.

Up to this time, Cermak as yet had no real opportunity to reveal his great capacity for administrative work,

the executive ability which in his private life steadily pulled him up from poverty to comparative riches. That chance came when in 1922 his party designated him as candidate for President of the Cook County Board of Commissioners. Again, Cermak won the office by a large majority—the first time he was voted on by citizens outside his own neighborhood.

The Presidency of the Cook County Board is a job nearly as important in Chicago's civic life as that of mayor. The county's financial budget is nearly as large as the city's. There is a large school system, comparable to the city educational system. The County Board administers large welfare institutions such as the Cook County Hospital, the old people's homes, the homes for the poor and the relief agencies. In addition, the county has jurisdiction over widespread recreational grounds, no less important than the city park system. Administration of the jail and Criminal Court agencies come within the duties of the county government.

Even the political enemies of Cermak were forced to view with admiration the record he made as President of the Cook County Board. At a time when other governmental agencies, particularly the city government, were causing tax burdens on property owners to rise steadily,



Cermak actually decreased county taxes. At the same time he was broadening the activities of the county government, increasing its efficiency and giving the taxpayers more than they had ever gotten before for their money. The county institutions, such as the hospital and the poor farms, were raised by Cermak to among the finest in the country. The unfortunates cared for in the institutions—and the taxpayers—profited by the administrative and humanitarian wonders worked by him and under his personal direction.

Practical as he was, Cermak had vision, coupled with a clear understanding of the life of the millions of people, common people, within Cook County. One of his realized dreams was the establishment of restful havens and playgrounds within reach of the ordinary citizen, so that the toiling masses could find surcease from the grime and strain of metropolitan existence. The well-to-do could live along the lake-bound North Shore, where forests were private property. The comfortably fixed could pile into their automobiles and drive into the Wisconsin woods. But the residents on the West Side, the men and women and children in the poorer districts, the neighbors he never forgot, had no such advantages.

As President of the Cook County Board, Cermak saw

and seized the opportunity to create and preserve for the masses—within easy access from their homes—a vast wooded territory which would be the “people’s playground” in every sense. The great recreational system known as the Cook County Forest Preserves, which skirts Chicagoland to the West and Southwest, was the result. That these expanses of shrubbery and grass and sheltering trees should be kept in perpetuity for the common men and women, and their children, was Cermak’s goal.

Under his direction, the county purchased hundreds of acres of forest land, all within walking distance from street car lines. Shelter houses were erected. Picnic grounds were cleared and equipped with tables, benches and fireplaces. Swimming pools were constructed for the youngsters and recreation building erected. Golf courses were laid out. Thus Chicago’s underprivileged, the masses from which Cermak himself sprang, came into “country clubs” all their own. No monument of marble or stone could be a greater memorial to Cermak than this people’s playground which he developed. Every Summer season, thousands upon thousands of Chicagoans find rest and wholesome pleasure in these woodland preserves. Young Chicagoans—future mayors, perhaps—play ball on green fields, fish by shaded brooks, “duck” each other in clean pools. Parents of all nationalities and creeds and trades find refresh-

ment there from hard city toil. Laughter echoes through the trees. A life never before open to millions of Chicagoans is now theirs—thanks to Cermak.

While engaged in developing the Forest Preserve Cermak established a custom which marked a new departure in municipal government, distinguished him as a public official of superior type and helped win for him even greater confidence on the part of the citizenry of Cook County. This was the formation of a "citizens' committee" to advise with him on administrative problems. A Democrat, he selected as chairman of the "Citizens' Forest Preserve Advisory Committee" a leading Republican business man. Other Republicans served on the committee. In all his acts relating to the Forest Preserves, he consulted with this committee of representative men and women. He sought and received their advice. More important, he received their support when he went to the people for approval of bond issues necessary to development of the recreational system.

Here was a new note in Chicago politics. It was instantly recognized by the citizens as an indication that in Cermak they had a public official who placed public welfare and the public interest first. When he became Mayor of Chicago, one of Cermak's first acts was the appoint-



ment of a similar committee of representative citizens to advise with him on all municipal problems. It was a step calculated to win for him the confidence of all groups in the city, all-important in view of the desperate condition of the city's finances. And it did just that. Chicago had reason to believe that in its period of crisis—the years from 1931 to 1933 being no less a period of crisis for Chicago than that of the Great Fire—it had in the Mayor's chair a man superbly equipped for the job at hand.

Before Cermak's memorable and overwhelming election as Mayor of Chicago, he was to make an unsuccessful campaign for United States Senator from Illinois. This was in 1927—a bad year for a Democrat to seek a national office, particularly in a state as historically Republican as Illinois was. George Brennan, then “boss” of the Democratic organization in Cook County, was to have made the race for Senator, but was stricken fatally before the time came.

None of the surviving leaders of the party cared to be the candidate. It had been years since Illinois had elected a Democrat to the United States Senate. And 1928, the peak of “Coolidge prosperity,” was obviously not the time for an upset. It took no Warwick to make that diagnosis.

Yet, the Democrats had to put up a candidate. Not just any candidate, either, but one who could command the confidence of large numbers of persons and fill the office capably if, by some miracle, elected. But who would make the sacrifice—for sacrifice it was—and endure the physical punishment that a state-wide campaign entails? One after another, the available men declined, offered excuses of this and that.

Then, once more, up spoke “Tony” Cermak:

“I’ll do it!”

While destined to end in failure—and Cermak had none of the illusions that a less shrewd candidate might have had on that score—the campaign he waged for the Senatorship was one of the most notable in the political history of Illinois. Cermak knew he couldn’t be elected, not in a Republican year, but the Republicans were not so sure after he went into action. For one thing, his opponents preferred to talk of other things besides prohibition, particularly in metropolitan Chicago where anti-prohibition sentiment was strong. And Cermak liked nothing better than to hit at prohibition with both fists.

All through the State he went, carrying high the banner of personal liberty, assailing the forces that saddled

the Eighteenth Amendment on the nation. Nor did he compromise with this principle while campaigning in "dry" districts of the State, of which there were many outside Chicago. Unlike many politicians who talked "dry" to "drys" and "wet" to "wets," Cermak talked "wet" to all, and, whether they agreed or not, his listeners admired him for his courage.

As was expected, Cermak was defeated in the Hoover landslide. But his campaign efforts were not lost. The gains which he made revealed that with intensive efforts, with real organization, Illinois could be carried for the Senatorship by a Democrat. This was proved two years later in the election of Senator James Hamilton Lewis, who obviously profited from seeds sown by Cermak in the 1927 campaign. And it was demonstrated more conclusively than ever in 1932 when Cermak was in supreme command of the Illinois Democracy.

A few months after his Senatorial campaign, Cermak suffered the first real tragedy of his life. Mary Cermak, his wife, mother of his three daughters and constant help-mate, died after a long illness.

He never really recovered from his grief. But Chicago profited through his tragic loss, for more than ever he threw himself into efforts to serve his city, working as few men can.



“Big Bill” and “Tony Boloney”



## CHAPTER III

### "BIG BILL" AND "TONY BOLONEY"

April 7th, 1931, may well go down in the history of Chicago as the date of the city's "redemption." Redemption from forces which were making Chicago a byword of derision the world over. Redemption from elements which were causing the world to refer to Chicago as the "crime capital" and "gangster city." It was the date when Anton Joseph Cermak, the Bohemian-born former mine boy, was elected Mayor of the second largest metropolis in the United States.

Of course, Chicago was not the only city, in either the United States or the world, that had sinister elements in its midst. The liquor gangsters, the racketeers, the crooked politicians and the corrupt police officials were not Chicago "products" and Chicago had no monopoly on them. But the city did have more than its share. And it did have the most notorious gangsters, notably Capone and his henchmen.

Gang murders, kidnapings, bombings had happened so frequently that the average Chicagoan began to take



reports of them in the newspapers as ordinary news. Racketeers began making inroads on legitimate business, imposing by strong-arm methods extra-legal taxes on trade. The business community groaned under the extortion, but appeared helpless.

Rumors of corruption at the City Hall filled the atmosphere. There were, indeed, indictments and even convictions of public officials. The expenditure of public funds increased by leaps and bounds. While prosperity continued, there were only a few voices raised at the mounting budgets and tax rates. Civic morale was at low ebb. Chicago was drifting. Protesters were shouted down as "reformers."

But Chicago was due for an awakening. Two happenings hastened its coming. The first was the murder in the Illinois Central railroad station tunnel of a reporter for the Chicago Tribune, Alfred ("Jake") Lingle. Not even the murder of seven men at one time in a North Side garage on the St. Valentine's Day of 1927 had the fortifying effect that this outrage had on the city.

The murder of the newspaper man forced Chicago to take stock. The citizenry arose as one man and called for a cleanup in the city's crime situation. In no uncertain terms, demand was made for a final and definite separation of alliances between politicians and gangsters, police

and criminals. The inability of the city government to cope with the crime problem was brought into bold relief. The Lingle murder was an effective lesson to Chicago.

The other happening was the stock market collapse of 1929, herald of the depression to come. With the stocks, incomes fell. Rents declined. Property owners faced ruin—particularly unless their tax burdens were decreased. And the only way taxes could be decreased was by cutting the costs of government.

Here was a man's job. Who was the man?

Chicago's two main governments, city and county, are housed in the same building. Separated only by corridors were the city and county offices. But close as they were physically, the two governments were miles apart by other standards.

While the city's financial credit was slipping, the county's was never in better shape. While the city's taxes were mounting, the county's were decreasing, or at least remaining constant. While inefficiency in city administration was becoming notorious, business-like procedure governed in the county offices. While the Mayor of Chicago was away on boat trips and other expeditions, so that it was deemed unusual for him to occupy his office, the

President of the County Board was on the job, working overtime more times than not.

The contrasts were so marked that the citizens of Chicago, as the time for the mayoralty election of 1931 drew near, began to watch the President of the County Board—Cermak—more closely. They liked the way he tackled the county's problems and solved them.

Hence, when the Democratic organization nominated Anton Joseph Cermak for the office of Mayor, there was immediate favorable response on the part of the public. Men and women of independent political thought rallied to his support. Business leaders, college professors, women's clubs' leaders joined with the "men on the street" in the work of electing Cermak mayor.

Cermak's opponent was William Hale Thompson, otherwise "Big Bill, the Builder," who was then mayor and had been mayor three terms previously. A master showman, keen political psychologist, clever strategist, Thompson was no easy opponent to overcome—not even with the poor condition of the city in Cermak's favor.

It was a memorable campaign, probably the last of its kind that Chicago will ever see. Giant opposites were arrayed against each other; the master of arousing crowd

emotions against the master of hard facts. Thompson dispensed ballyhoo; Cermak, arguments. Thompson talked of "America First" and assailed the League of Nations. Cermak talked of municipal finances, high taxes, efficiency in government. It was a war between intellect and emotion.

Thompson might even have won that election had he not made one serious mistake in campaign tactics. His "America First" platform was a subtle dig at the fact that Cermak was foreign born. But Thompson, as he became desperate, dropped subtlety and openly sneered at the former mine boy's nationality. He referred to Cermak as "Tony Boloney" and attempted to belittle his opponent with songs about "Tony, where's your push-cart at?"

While the crowds that attended these political circuses laughed at these sneers at Cermak's nationality, Thompson had failed to consider that when he poked fun at the name Cermak, he was also poking fun at all except purely Anglo-Saxon names. And such names were borne by hundreds of thousands of Chicagoans who would pour out to vote on election day.

And these Chicagoans resented Thompson's tactics. They felt an un-American issue had been injected into the mayoralty campaign. It was not only the people of

Cermak's nationality, of whom there are many thousands in Chicago, who felt this way. The Poles and the Russians and the Italians vowed vengeance at the polls. Likewise the Jewish citizens, and even a large number of Germans, whose solid vote Thompson was in the habit of counting on because of his stand before America entered the world war. Thompson actually made thousands of votes for Cermak.

Throughout this type of campaign on the part of his opponent, Cermak never lost his characteristic dignity. Some of his advisors at times counseled that he return the Thompson tactics in kind, but Cermak overruled them. He put his trust in facts—and in organization. The louder Thompson became, the harder Cermak pounded at facts and at the work of getting his organization to function at top speed. Most candidates for high office are content to be just candidates and leave the organization work to others. But Cermak was not. He had a hand in the organization work, too, pushing the buttons and pulling the levers that make a political machine function effectively. Cermak the Leader was beginning to emerge.

The result was an overwhelming victory for Cermak. The whole nation had watched that election battle. Indeed, the whole world had. Whether rightly or wrongly,



the judgment of the world was that victory for Cermak meant that Chicago was prepared to put its house in order.

In the tiny town of Kladno, where Cermak was born and where his father had worked as a coal miner, a public celebration was held.

Over on the West Side of Chicago, the thousands of foreign-born citizens felt a new sense of patriotism and loyalty. Chicago, a “melting pot” as great as New York, had elected its first foreign-born mayor.





# In the Mayor's Chair



## CHAPTER IV

### IN THE MAYOR'S CHAIR

On assuming the position of Mayor of Chicago, Anton Cermak inherited a state of affairs that would have paled a less capable and strong executive.

There was little or no proper morale among most of the city employees. Only a few were in the habit of giving a full day's service for a full day's pay. Cermak was faced with the task of rebuilding virtually every department in order to give the service to the citizens which he insisted upon.

Worse than that, he found the city's treasury in a hopeless position.

"I knew," he said some months later, "that the city was in bad shape financially. But I never dreamed that it was entirely broke, flat broke. Hardly a nickel was left."

He found that not only was the corporate treasury virtually bare, but the city was in debt for millions of dol-

lars. In addition, various funds such as the policemen and firemen's pension funds and the traction fund, to be used for building a subway, were virtually gone, I. O. U.'s in their place. The I. O. U.'s were legal—but they were not money.

What made the situation even more serious was that the city's two sources of revenue for operating—credit and tax payments—were about dried up. The bankers, who already held millions of dollars' worth of city paper, refused to buy more. And thousands of taxpayers were contesting their assessments, meanwhile refusing to pay any of their taxes. No mayor in the whole history of Chicago ever faced so serious a problem.

Cermak faced it—resolutely and with courage that defied defeat. All his tremendous energy was thrown into the task of rescuing Chicago, not only from its financial muddle, but from its crime state as well. Many times, at midnight, a light burned on the fifth floor of the City Hall. Chicago's mayor, who knew how to work, was at his job, not infrequently sixteen hours and more a day.

One thing stood out clearly in Mayor Cermak's mind. This was that expenses of the city had to be cut, not here and there, nor in dribblets "to make a showing," but drastically. Millions, not thousands, had to be saved. Cermak

set out to save them—and succeeded. In the first nine months of his term, from April through December, he saved the city eight millions of dollars. As he went along, he accomplished even greater savings until the cost of running Chicago under his administration was \$1,500,000 a month less than under the administration of his predecessor.

Miracle of miracles—for Chicago—the city was being run more efficiently, the taxpayers were getting more for their investment in the government, although the cost of government was much less. Cermak was at the helm! City employes were now actually working, not loafing. They had been ordered to either give real service or receive the “axe”—and they gave the service. Cermak himself set the pace.

By April, 1932, the whole Chicago picture had been changed. Within one year, Cermak had restored Chicago's credit to such an extent that the bankers again were willing to loan the city funds for operating until taxes began coming in. Moreover, that part of the world that had become accustomed to looking down upon Chicago scornfully, began to look up to her with respect. Efficient, economical government became the demand throughout the nation—and Chicago, under Cermak, was leading the way.

Thus, the Syracuse, New York, *Herald* remarked editorially a year after Cermak became mayor:

"They call it the capital of gangdom, but actually Chicago is the capital of American hope. Watch the town. For all its Page One lawlessness it may play an important part in leading the country out of its present difficulties."

But Mayor Cermak's efforts at putting the Chicago city government back on its feet did not meet with praise from all quarters. He made enemies, many of them, as any public official who seeks to do his duty, particularly the unpleasant duty of keeping expenditures down, must. Thousands expected to get political jobs under Cermak. Many of these according to the rules of the game were entitled to jobs. But new rules had to be made to fit the circumstances. And Cermak, politician though he was, made the new rules. He informed his organization that there would be no soft jobs and not as many jobs. Ordinarily, this would have meant political suicide—but Cermak gained in power rather than lost.

For one thing, Cermak saw to it that he kept the confidence of the public. Without that he realized his efforts would fail. Therefore, from the beginning he had a citizens' committee, composed of leading men and women of the city of both parties. He had learned the value of

this while President of the County Board. Nor did he permit the committee to be a mere paper affair. Real problems were put up to its members and they worked with the mayor. When the time came to push through a program, either in the city council or in the legislature, the support of this group proved invaluable.

In addition, Mayor Cermak inaugurated a series of radio programs, by which he went directly to the people, discussing with them the problems he faced and how he intended to solve them. Heads of various departments, at his direction, also talked over the radio about their individual problems. Thus the people knew what Cermak was doing—and backed him up. It is noteworthy that President Roosevelt has made similar use of the radio for keeping the confidence of the people in his administration of national affairs.

It is hardly possible to exaggerate the amount of will power Mayor Cermak had to exert in behalf of his economy program. The depression was having its effect in no uncertain fashion on Chicago. Jobs began to become scarce. Business was falling off. That meant more than ever “deserving” Democrats were looking for jobs with the city. Not just precinct captains, but men important politically brought tremendous pressure upon the Mayor.



That he was able to resist most of this pressure revealed that Cermak was Mayor first and a Democrat second. Luckily, for Chicago he was now by dint of his personal character and personal following, emerging as the real head of his party—thus was in a position to withstand the avalanche of requests and demands for political appointments. Every time he refused to make an addition to the city payroll, he was making enemies and losing future votes. Cermak knew that.

“I know I’m hurting myself politically,” he said once. “But I’ve got to do this. The city just hasn’t the money.”

Cermak attacked the crime problem by making the police department function as it never had before. Although he was forced to cut down the size of the force, Cermak actually had more uniformed men on the streets. He did this by ordering a drastic reduction in the number of “desk” and other “inside” jobs on the police force. The result was that Chicago suffered from less crime—despite the amount of unemployment and distress in the city.

While cutting out numerous jobs in the city payroll, Cermak acted intelligently and with sympathy. The fat and frill jobs were the first to go, necessary functions being maintained when at all possible. From some quarters there came demands upon him to discharge nearly

3,000 men and women at one time in order to save a certain percent of the budget. However, Cermak resisted the pressure for this wholesale slaughter of city employes and worked out a plan whereby all employes sacrificed seventy-eight days' pay a year. Under that plan everybody was happy—and the desired saving achieved. It goes without saying that Cermak eliminated devices and schemes by which Chicago's treasury had been milked in former years. For example, the so-called "real estate experts," who had been employed in former administrations at fabulous fees for work that was more invisible than real, disappeared entirely.

The problem of the payless paydays for city employes was the most discouraging of all. No man in Chicago felt more keenly the distress that this situation occasioned among the honest municipal employes. And no one worked harder to bring them relief than did Cermak. It was not yet solved at his death, but there was reason to believe it was then near solution.

Political enemies would taunt the Mayor on the fact that employes were paid regularly under Thompson.

"Sure they were," admitted Mayor Cermak. "But how? When the bankers shut down on loans, he dipped

into the various funds, leaving I. O. U.'s. Well, those funds haven't anything else in them now."

This statement stopped further comment. There wasn't much answer to that.

Although legally it was not his responsibility, and despite the fact that he had enough problems that were his, Mayor Cermak nevertheless also shouldered the special problem of the payless paydays for Chicago's school teachers. Even some Chicagoans to this day may be surprised to know that paying the school teachers was not up to the Mayor. As a matter of fact, a great many of the teachers themselves did not know this—and a number unthinkingly blamed Mayor Cermak because they went without pay. The true situation was that Mayor Cermak was laboring unceasingly, to the extent of endangering his health, to help the teachers.

The school pay problem was not Cermak's, because the board of education is a separate government body independent of the city. While the Mayor appoints the members of the board, they serve terms that overlap mayoralty elections. At that time the school board membership was dominated by Thompson appointees, who were not anxious to cooperate with the Democratic city

administration. There was opposition to Cermak's economy program in school affairs.

Because he knew the general public held him responsible for the situation in school finances, Cermak asked the Thompson appointees to resign, that he might install members of his own choice who would carry out his policies. The Thompson men refused. Because the school board balked at economy proposals, the banks refused to purchase its paper which would have made possible salary payments to the school employes.

Cermak could have washed his hands of the problem. He had trouble enough of his own. But he didn't. It grieved him that Chicago's school teachers were going unpaid for months at a time. Hence, each time he was able to scrape up sufficient cash to permit a payday for the city employes, Cermak ordered that the money be divided so that the teachers might also be paid. This was done by having the city buy the school board paper that the banks refused. Many persons advised Cermak against using the city money to pay the teachers unless the Republican school trustees resigned. But it was not in Cermak's character to make the teachers suffer for political stubbornness on the part of a few men.

To the day of his death, the plight of the teachers,

as well as of the city employes, weighed on Cermak. Indeed, it was to obtain help from the federal government for them that caused him to go to Florida to meet with President Roosevelt—and to his death. Teachers, some of whom had attacked him while he lived, acknowledged their great debt to him by public resolutions passed as he lay on his deathbed in Miami.

Few mayors have worked at their job as hard as Cermak did. Not in the best of health, anyway, in his later years, he was continually warned by his associates to take things easier. But he couldn't—not while Chicago still had serious financial problems to be solved. On top of everything else, Cermak insisted on presiding over every meeting of the city council, a custom which previous mayors had abandoned more or less. Cermak believed it his duty—and did it religiously.

But what his friends feared—a breakdown—came in the summer of 1932 after the Mayor had gone through the strenuous activity attending the state primary election and then the Democratic national convention in Chicago which nominated Franklin D. Roosevelt and in which he played a leading role, both as official host and as Democratic national committeeman of Illinois. After a period of confinement in a hospital, his doctors and friends finally persuaded him to go abroad for six weeks to rest.



But even while abroad, Cermak couldn't keep from working. He selected two jobs for himself. The first was to counteract the impression in Europe that Chicago is a city of gangsters and none else. The second was to act as "salesman" for the Century of Progress Exposition, of which he so proudly expected to be official host. His fame as an administrator had preceded him, and he was given rousing ovations in the capital cities of the old world. The celebration that pleased him most was the one given him in the tiny town of Kladno, his birthplace and that of his father and mother. The entire town turned out to greet its most distinguished son. It was one of Cermak's happiest moments.

Refreshed by his European sojourn, Cermak returned to Chicago to receive a civic welcome that exceeded, in enthusiasm and in the size of the throngs, almost any similar event in the history of the city. It was estimated that more than two hundred thousand Chicagoans lined the streets to greet him "hello." A huge parade followed the car that carried him through the cheering throngs from the railroad station to the City Hall. Deeply moved, although not an emotional man, he delivered an address of optimistic tone to a huge gathering on the LaSalle Street side of the City Hall. He said afterward that this welcome amply repaid him for the worry and concern

which the city's onerous financial problems caused him.

Firm in his conviction that he could find the solutions to those problems, he set to work with renewed vigor. That he would have solved them had he been spared from an assassin's bullet, his friends were convinced.

How well he grappled with those problems is indicated by a statement of the "Citizens Committee on Public Expenditures," Fred W. Sargent, president of the Northwestern Railroad, chairman. It was:

"Since he took office, Anton J. Cermak endeavored with all his force to bring order out of the chaotic conditions that had existed in our city. His efforts and those of his department heads, aided by the city council, have brought very definite and beneficial results. Aside from an increase in the efficiency of government, Mayor Cermak, to meet this period of financial and economic stress, had caused to be made substantial reductions in the cost of government. This is and will continue to be of vital importance to the taxpayers."

That Mayor Cermak succeeded in erasing from the minds of non-Chicagoans the belief that it is not safe to come to Chicago is indicated by one simple but significant fact. Before he became mayor, Chicago was sixth among convention cities. At his death, it was first.



“Boss” Cermak



## CHAPTER V

### "BOSS" CERMAK

Chicago has had a number of men who could qualify for the label political "boss." Most powerful were the Democratic "bosses." There was Roger Sullivan, greatest of his time. Then "Boss" George Brennan, who ruled through his genial ability to get along with the "boys." Both, of course, were Irishmen. The large cities of the United States have been accustomed to seeing sons of Erin climb to the posts of political overlordship. It remained for Cermak, native of Kladno, Czechoslovakia, to be the most powerful Chicago "boss" of them all.

Whether Cermak would have increased his power, extending it nationally, or whether he was at his peak, will never be known. The fact remains that just before his death he had more power, wielded greater political influence than any man in the history of Illinois. Not only was he Mayor, in his own right, of Chicago, a city of more than three million. He virtually controlled with dictatorial power the Chicago city council. He named and elected United States senators and congressmen. He

named the Governor of Illinois. A good portion of the Illinois State Legislature, in which he had served as a greenhorn hardly more than twenty years before, acknowledged him as leader. Moreover, he controlled many of the Cook County officials and was soon to have extended his influence among federal officials.

In many ways, Cermak was the "ideal" political boss—if a political boss under a democracy can be called ideal. While other bosses frequently ignored the real bosses, the citizens, Cermak definitely sought public favor. At no time in his career can it be said that he acted on a policy of the "public be damned," which many other bosses have followed. There was in him a subtle combination of the principles of Mussolini and of Jefferson.

Cermak took over the reins of the Democratic organization in Cook County gradually and naturally. Following the death of Brennan, a group conducted the affairs of the party. They represented a number of nationalities and faiths, the Irish Catholics predominating. It was expected that out of the inner struggle for personal power that was bound to be waged another Irishman would emerge as the recognized leader. Instead, the leader was the Bohemian, Cermak.

A number of reasons may be given to explain Cer-

mak's ascendancy to the thrones heretofore occupied by the Brennans and the Sullivans. Some would have to do with his personal characteristics. Well-built, not unattractive in appearance, he had the physique, the personality and the carriage that stood out, dominated. Like most successful men in politics, he talked little, but when he did talk he knew whereof he spoke and, when necessary, could shout down the loudest. Other reasons would have to do with his large personal following among the Bohemians. It is no exaggeration to say that he "carried in his pocket" at least 100,000 votes—no unimportant item in a political organization. Still other reasons might have to do with his policy of retaining, personally, positions of power. Thus, while most political leaders are content to name others to offices, remaining in the background themselves, Cermak believed in holding office himself. It meant more work and from some viewpoints it was riskier, but it was wiser. In line with this, even after he became Mayor, he retained the post of ward committeeman and later obtained for himself the post of national committeeman.

But probably the most potent reason for Cermak's rise to power was his understanding of the part nationalities can play in a political organization. Member of a minority nationality himself, Cermak realized that if most

of the minority groups, the Bohemians, the Poles, the Germans, the Russians, the Greeks, the Irish, etc., could be marshaled under one banner, the most powerful, numerically, political organization in Chicago would result. Past leaders of the Democratic organization had placed greatest emphasis on the Irish. In former years this was probably the correct position. It remained for Cermak, however, to see that greater strength lay in catering more to a combination of other national groups.

When in power, Cermak placed his policy into action by causing nearly all candidates for office and prospective jobholders to pass the "nationality test." In other words, a man was slated for an elective position not merely for personal reasons, but because he was calculated to draw to the whole ticket 50,000 Polish votes or 25,000 Italian votes, as the case might be. Every county and state ticket with which Cermak had to do was built along those lines. The most successful state and county ticket in the history of Illinois Democracy—that of November, 1932—was practically perfect in balance according to nationalities. Virtually every national minority was represented. Such a system may not always place the best men in office, but it did win elections which, to the organization, is the important thing.

By applying this method, Cermak became one of the

fairest of party dictators. Holding in most cases to the nationality test, not excluding, however, other tests, he rarely permitted purely personal reasons to decide whether or not a certain individual was or was not to be a candidate. Thus, while he may not have had affection for John Doe, if he knew Doe could swing a good number of voters the party's way, Doe got on the ticket. Cermak had thus introduced a kind of "merit" system into party politics. Its fairness to the other men in the organization was apparent. For that reason, while Cermak ruled, there was a minimum of dissension within the party councils. Such had not always been the case.

That Cermak definitely was conscious of a responsibility to the citizenry and entertained no desire of forcing the voters to accept "anybody" for public office, was indicated by his choice for the Democratic candidate for Governor in 1932. This was a year in which it was fairly certain that almost any candidate on the Democratic ticket would win. If he had been a different type of boss, Cermak might have dictated the nomination of a mere political puppet, an anybody or a nobody. Instead, he selected the type of man who would have been chosen by thoughtful and independent citizens themselves—Henry Horner, of clean record and unimpeachable integrity. It was agreed generally when Governor Horner's nomination



was announced that probably no finer candidate for office had been offered Illinois in generations. Such was Cermak's brand of bossism.

The victory for Governor Horner in the primary election of April, 1932, and in the election in November definitely established Cermak, if there were any question, as the most powerful figure in the Democratic party of Illinois. For one thing, Cermak was made the main issue in both campaigns. Michael L. Igoe, leader of a great portion of the Irish element in the party, ran against Horner for the nomination for Governor and based his campaign almost entirely on attacks on "Cermak dictatorship." The Republicans in November followed Igoe's lead, seeking to elect former Governor Len Small over Horner by "warning" the state against the "Cermak Tammany." Had Governor Horner been defeated in either of those contests, the party would have blamed Cermak, and his regime as dictator would have ended. As it was, he emerged stronger than ever.

Although "boss," Cermak assumed no lordly airs. To the end, he remained among the easiest of men to talk to and approach. As if Kipling's "If" were his creed, he kept the common touch, although his power was as great as many kings'. He treated subordinates in the party as equals, although he did insist on having orders carried

out, brooking no disobedience once he was convinced of his position.

In Cermak's makeup there was no desire for ostentation or glorification. Politics was his business and he "worked at it" as a business man. Other political leaders affected flashy attire, flowery oratory, craved public attention. Cermak was the exact opposite. He was conservative in speech, in mannerisms, and in appearance. No orator, he expressed himself in straight-forward fashion, preferring to tell his listeners facts rather than entertain or stir them emotionally. He neither understood nor admired the artifices of political hokum.

Cermak looked upon politics as a profession for specialists, just as the law and medicine. In an article contributed by him to a business journal, he definitely took issue with the claim that business leaders ought to be elected to political offices. He insisted that business leaders most generally fail, that a successful mayor or governor or president results, not from good intentions, but from experience in the "game of politics."

He could have cited his own record.

Many observers of Cermak's career and his development had begun to feel that Chicago's mayor would raise

to unsuspected heights the moral level of political organizations in Illinois. His vision was constantly broadening. Of wealth, he had sufficient. Possessed of his great political power only a short period, he was on the threshold of using that power for—who can tell? There was much basis for believing that it would have been used to further great movements in Chicago and the state to better the lot of the common citizen, from whose ranks he came. If so, the system that produces political bossism would have been, for probably the first time, amply and sufficiently justified.

“I’m Glad It Was Me  
Instead of You!”



## CHAPTER VI

"I'M GLAD IT WAS ME INSTEAD OF YOU!"

February 15, 1933.

It is evening in Florida. Already a tremendous crowd has gathered in Bay Front Park in Miami to greet Franklin D. Roosevelt, still president-elect, on his return to the mainland from a yacht cruise. There is much excitement and great tenseness. Popular everywhere, President Roosevelt is especially so in the South, and the Floridans are determined that he be given a rousing welcome. In seventeen days he becomes President of the United States.

Men and women of all walks of life stream into the park. There is a mardi gras atmosphere, none except one man having any inkling of the tragedy that is to come soon, shocking not only a nation, but the world.

That man is small, rat-like, unkempt Guiseppe Zangara. Of warped mind, he had come, not to cheer the new president, but to kill him. Only the day before he had purchased the gun—in Miami.

In another section of the park, pushing his way cheer-

fully through the crowd, disdaining any honors that were rightfully his because he was one who played a major part in making Franklin Roosevelt president, was Chicago's mayor, Anton Joseph Cermak. One thing he had in common with the maniacal Zangara. Both were foreign-born.

Now that he was here, Cermak was enjoying this demonstration in honor of Roosevelt. As a matter of fact, however, he had preferred to remain in Chicago. There were so many city problems that needed his attention. Most important of them had to do with getting money to pay the salaries of the city employes and the school teachers. Their condition was becoming more desperate daily, and Cermak was bending every effort in their regard. He wanted to stay in Chicago, but went to Miami with the thought that he would be able to make a strong personal appeal then to Roosevelt for federal aid for Chicago's teachers, policemen and firemen.

Cermak was thinking of this appeal as he pushed his way toward the spot where Roosevelt's car had stopped. Roosevelt was speaking now. After he had finished and the throng was roaring its approval, Chicago's mayor approached. The Roosevelt car was about to start up when the president-elect saw Cermak, motioned him to come over.

This was the chance Cermak had hoped for. In a few,



forceful words he was prepared to tell Roosevelt of Chicago's problem, urge him to give aid quickly.

But Guiseppe Zangara at this moment was drawing his gun. He fired. And Anton Cermak slumped forward, a bullet in his back. Four others in the crowd were wounded also. Roosevelt was spared, miraculously. But the joy felt by the crowd, echoed through the nation, that the President-elect was saved, quickly gave way to profound concern that Cermak had fallen a victim of the crazed assassin's bullet. For he, too, was needed by the nation.

Supported by Roosevelt himself, Mayor Cermak was transported, more dead than alive, to the hospital in Miami.

The President-elect was saying:

"Tony, don't move." "Keep quiet."

Not Mr. Mayor, nor Mr. Cermak, but Tony, the President-elect called him.

As he lay against the supporting shoulder of Roosevelt, perhaps through Cermak's mind ran the recollection of that derisive campaign song, "Tony, where's your pushcart at?"

They called him Tony then, to belittle him.

Now, the President of the United States, called him Tony. . . . He stirred a bit, then was quiet as if obeying the President's command.

At the hospital, Cermak rallied from his coma. Conscious completely now, all his concern was for Roosevelt. When Roosevelt came to Cermak's side in the hospital, Chicago's mayor spoke words that the world will not soon forget.

"I'm glad it was me instead of you," he said.

Mist came over the eyes of those who heard him thus speak from a patriot's heart.

"I'm glad it was me instead of you."

Not grammatical, some academic student of grammar may argue. But what grammarian has expressed loftier thought?

Choked for a moment from the pain of Zangara's bullet, Cermak spoke again to Roosevelt.

"I wish you would take care of yourself," he said. "The country needs you."

Said President Roosevelt: "We need you and men like you."

It was a scene the nation will long remember and cherish.

As Cermak lay on his deathbed, heroically fighting to live, bearing tremendous pain uncomplainingly, messages of hope for his recovery poured into Miami. They came from all parts of the nation and the world. They came from men and women high in the ranks of government, business and society. And they came from the humblest citizens on Chicago's West Side. Quickly, his family came to his bedside. Hiding his pain, Cermak asked his three daughters and their husbands, to whom he was as a father also, to cast aside gloom.

"I'll get well," he said.

Even then, his body attacked by a score of pains, Cermak thought, not of his own suffering, but of the suffering of Chicago's school teachers. In delirious moments, he talked of that problem of their salaries.

When he discovered a week after he had been shot that money could be paid to teachers if his signature could be obtained, Cermak insisted on signing against the wishes of his doctors. Because he felt it would help the teachers, again he defied the doctors to give an interview expressing the hope that if he did not recover, his successor would make it a first duty to bend every effort in behalf of the teachers. If his wounding would focus greater attention on the teachers' plight and speed help to them, he was glad he was shot, the Mayor said.

Days passed, days of mixed anxiety and hope, cheer and despair. Governor Henry Horner came from Springfield to be at his bedside. Forced to return to Illinois, the Governor left with the feeling that the man who had meant so much to him would recover. Soon the attending physicians were issuing bulletins radiating optimism. Amazing vitality on the part of the patient, the vitality that had pulled him up from the coal mines of Braidwood to chief executive of America's second city, appeared to have won the battle against the bullet.

Just as Chicago and the nation began to feel that Cermak would be spared, pneumonia developed. Then more infections. On the morning of March 6, the nation awakened to learn that Cermak had gone to a martyr's fate, joining Lincoln, McKinley and that former World Fair mayor of Chicago, Carter Harrison, Senior.

In his office in the Chicago City Hall was a group of men. They were strong men, picked by Cermak for his associates because they were strong.

His secretary for many years, Henry Sonnenschein, had just received the word by telephone from Miami.

"Gentlemen," he said, "Tony is dead."

There were tears in the eyes of those strong men, tears which they made no effort to hide.

# Farewell



## CHAPTER VII

### FAREWELL

As few times in its history, the nation mourned. Through the breadth and length of the land there was realization that Cermak's tragic, untimely passing was not just Chicago's loss, but the country's. It was a time when many strong men, capable leaders, were needed—and the former mine boy was one of the strongest.

In Washington, Roosevelt, then president but two days, struggling with the monumental national problem of the collapse of the banking system, shoved aside his tasks to reveal profound grief. Zangara's bullet was meant for him and he shared the belief of the nation that Cermak had given his life for him.

The President, in a public statement, paid this tribute to the assassinated Mayor:

"It is needless to say that the news of the death of Mayor Cermak affects me very deeply and very personally. Aside from the tragic chain of events of which his death is the result, a very warm friendship and a very



high respect for Mayor Cermak's ability, friendship and loyalty to his friends would have made his loss a heavy one to me under any circumstances.

"The brave fight he made shows clearly the wonderful courage of the man. The country at large and the great city of Chicago in particular, will miss a strong and resolute character."

From far off Utah, came to Cermak's family this message from the Utah House of Representatives, exemplary of the national sentiment:

"Soldiers of war literally shield their country with their bodies. Mayor Cermak, as a glorious peace time soldier, offered his body in sacrifice that our beloved President might be spared. The entire membership of the Utah House of Representatives offers its condolences and grieves with you in this tremendous hour."

Silent, ashamed, now were those who not many months earlier had ridiculed the Mayor because he bore a foreign name. The name now was honored throughout the world, by high and low.

As was fitting, it remained for Chicago, the city he loved and for which he literally slaved, to pay the deepest tribute to the Mayor.

First, in a flag-draped casket, his body was borne to his home on Chicago's West Side. All day and through the night, the thousands came. Ermine mixed with calico. Laborers with bankers. Scrubwomen with aldermen. One by one they walked into the house of mourning to pay a last tender tribute and breathe the words: "Goodbye, Tony."

This ceremony in the home was his neighbors'. But Cermak was all Chicago's, and the next day his body lay in state in the great corridor of the City Hall. Officiating at the ceremonies held at the City Hall, Dr. Preston Bradley, pastor of the People's Church, paid the slain mayor a stirring tribute. It was a day of bitter cold. Chill winds whipped through the steel and stone canyons in Chicago's Loop. But from early morning to late at night, Chicagoans by the hundreds of thousands braved the cold to pay their mark of respect to Anton Cermak. All day they stood in silent lines around the mourning-draped City Hall. Here too, were Chicagoans of all classes, all creeds, all stations in life. One by one, the thousands passed down the candle-lighted corridor, paused for a brief moment before the casket, whispered their sorrow. All Chicago was mourning.

Not in the memory of any living Chicagoan had there ever been such a manifestation of civic grief as was dem-

onstrated at the funeral services for the slain Mayor. While perhaps a million Chicagoans lined the streets, heads bowed, fifty thousand citizens marched in the sad procession from the City Hall to the huge Chicago Stadium on the West Side, where public services were held. It was in this same Stadium, only a few months before, that Franklin D. Roosevelt was nominated for the Presidency with the aid of Cermak. Not far from the spot where Cermak stood that final evening of the convention and proclaimed that Illinois and Indiana votes were for Roosevelt, his body now rested, surrounded by a military guard of honor.

A personal representative of the President was there. The Governor of the State was there. So were the state's two United States senators and its representatives in Congress. Again high and low, indeed all Chicago, bowed at the bier of Anton Cermak.

Heart-felt tributes to the martyr were voiced by a Catholic priest, a Jewish rabbi, and a Protestant minister, for no one creed encompassed the spirit of Cermak.

"Chicago is better for his having been, even as it is poorer for his passing," said the rabbi, Dr. Louis L. Mann. "He was the symbol of democracy, embracing the opportunities of a country which elicited the best from

him and to which he gave his last full measure of devotion, and which loved him even as he loved it. He wielded mighty power with practical wisdom. . . . His reforms seemed too slow to the impatient idealist and too fast to the practical politicians, but they contained that wisdom of experience in public affairs through which, alone, real progress can be made."

"His was a dynamic personality, loaded with enough dynamite to pulverize all obstacles," said the Protestant minister, Dr. John Thompson. "This masterful personality of his explains his successful career. Many emphasize talents in explaining successful careers. But personality is even more the chief asset. Others emphasize education, and by this mean education in schools and behind four walls. But all education is not acquired in that way. Anton J. Cermak was educated in life's university of hard knocks."

"Mayor Cermak possessed the precious trait of loyal friendship to an unusual degree," said the priest, Father Daniel J. Frawley. "It was this, not learning, nor wealth, nor influence, that carried him from a humble and obscure beginning to the highest office that this great city can confer upon any of its citizens. At the very outset of his career we see him winning friends and as he advances in public recognition ever increasing their number by his

loyalty. His proud boast was that he never broke faith with them."

To his friend, Henry Horner, Governor of Illinois, fell the task of voicing the civic tribute. With sadness, the Governor sketched the life of Anton Cermak as a "shining example of democracy."

"It was characteristic of him," said the Governor, "that while suffering excruciating agonies on his death bed, he worried not as to whether or not he would recover, but whether the school teachers, the policemen and firemen and other public employes who were dependent upon his efforts for their compensation would be paid.

"He took command of his own political party and vitalized it into an instrument for unselfish public service. His industry was tireless, his judgment of men sound, his mind did its own thinking, and men could not frighten nor cajole him. Seldom has opportunity so well served talent.

"The thought that should be uppermost with us now is how best we may show that the mourning for our loss is not mere idle form. What would please him best is to know that we, his friends, were to carry on the great civic work he has undertaken."



To the assemblage, President Roosevelt sent a special message, sorrowful because he could not leave Washington to personally pay his respects to the martyred Mayor. He telegraphed:

“It is a sincere regret to me that the emergency of the present situation makes it impossible for me to leave Washington at this time, as otherwise I should have wanted to pay a last tribute to a true friend. Even without the tragic setting of his death, the passing of Anton Cermak would have brought me a sense of deep loss, and under the circumstances his untimely end came as an even deeper personal loss. I want you to feel that I mourn with his family.”

Such were the tributes to Anton Joseph Cermak, who in little more than three decades had climbed from penniless mule-driver in the Illinois mines to rank among the nation's great.

He was laid to rest in a family tomb in the Bohemian National Cemetery. Among the many floral tributes, none was so expressive of his character as that which in flowers repeated:

“I'm Glad It Was Me Instead of You!”

An epic of democracy had ended.

THE END.



CHICAGO PRINTERS, INC.



## ..ANTON.. THE MARTYR

HERE, in simple, straight-forward language, is the life story of Anton Joseph Cermak, Chicago's martyred mayor.

No effort is made in this volume to tell all the minute details of Mayor Cermak's life and career. But the numerous steps he took upward on the ladder to unusual success and great power, and the tremendous obstacles which he met and overcame—they are all told here in vivid, human fashion.

The story of Anton, the Martyr, is essentially a human document, an Epic, not only of Chicago, but of America. It is the kind of story that people of all classes, creeds and groups will treasure because of its warmth, its inspiration, and its proof that America still is a land of opportunity, where men of lowly birth and meagre means may reach the heights.

The author knows his man and understands the forces which Mayor Cermak encountered. He has treated Mayor Cermak with sympathy and understanding. He has produced a work which will bear re-reading, which many parents will wish to read to their children for the great lessons it unfolds.

## TRIBUTES TO MAYOR CERMAK

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*Governor Henry Horner of Illinois:*

"No power of destruction that Death can conjure will ever be strong enough to crush those forces which Anton Cermak set in motion and which will continue to live as long as recorded history will be read by men."

*Alfred E. Smith:*

"I learned with deep regret of the death of Mayor Cermak. I lose a good friend and the country loses a good citizen."

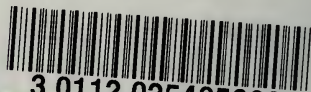
*Speaker Rainey of the U. S. House of Representatives:*

"A great man and a great executive has passed. Illinois and the country mourns his loss."

*Mayor R. B. Gautier of Miami:*

"He was a martyr who died in the cause of human rights."

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